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AUTHOR Sinatra, Richard
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ABSTRACT

This paper discusses several studies concerned with relating words to visual images, and suggests a visual strategy to generate writing at the secondary level. The three objectives of a visual writing strategy are to increase stimulation and involvement in writing activities, to guide the student in inferring organizational styles of writing from planned sequences of photographs, and to promote insights into reading a variety of paragraph patterns and writing styles. The level of language sophistication and thought processing of each student would determine how much growth in composition each would evidence from all three objectives. The student would be asked to infer the meaning of a series of photographs, composed into a sequence, and to link them together in writing. Each photograph could approximate a sentence, or a series of photographs could generate one or a number of connected sentences. Students would be stimulated to write a unified paragraph that had an intended, prearranged structure at its base. A visual to verbal literacy plan is also outlined. (TS)

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A Visual Strategy Plan for Writing and Organizational Improvement

by Richard Sinatra

In the hierarchy of language development - listening, speaking, reading, and writing - it is in the area of written communication that many of our secondary school children experience the most frustration and are often unable to get their verbal messages across. They frequently do not know where to begin a piece of writing nor do they know how to develop their ideas on a topic in a coordinated number of sentences.

Furthermore, each young person is not wired for language production in exactly the same way. While language is the common communicative denominator amongst all, it also reflects the uniqueness of each student as an individual. Personal interaction with present and past experiences, feelings, attitudes, and values makes each student even more individual and unique. Language then becomes the vehicle to describe this interaction with the environment and its experiences. No matter what the student's facility with the surface structure of language, each has internalized a deep and complicated understanding of language. A visual strategy plan will be presented in this paper suggesting that this deep structure of language can be elicited from the individual student through meaningful but non-verbal stimuli. Smith (1969) advised that while perceptions of a social, scientific, and aesthetic nature have become a part of a student's conscious behavior, he can be taught to perceive and discriminate in greater depth through selective experiences.

Visually Oriented Youth

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Our young people live in the visually-oriented world of television and movies where language usage and thought processing are tied to immediate visual messages. Schramm, Lyle, and Parker (1961) and Viggiani (1970) have reported the startling number of hours that our school-aged children are engaged in while television viewing on a daily and weekly basis. However, Geraci (1970) has strongly suggested that the child be weaned from these hours of passive visual reception so that his mind and eye can be put to work on active visual processing through the medium of photography. Similar active mental participation would also occur with the formulation of composition provoked by visual stimuli.

Sohn (1969), Leavitt (1969), and Leavitt and Sohn (1969) have long urged the student to stop, to observe, and to be aware of visual messages and the power of pictures to generate words. In another program (Sohn, 1970a), pictures were arranged on filmstrips to heighten the student's powers of observation and awareness regarding visual messages. This program was essentially designed to generate discussion, oral language production. Sohn (1970b) then pointed out three fundamental premises behind the techniques of using photographs to stimulate the power of observation. Precise observation of becoming aware of relationships in visual media, the use of projective thinking allowing concrete situations to provide the basis of oral communication, and the promotion of fluency were the aims of this visual literacy technique.

Visual Strategy Suggestions to Aid Word Association

West (1970) suggested, however, that English teachers provide more organizational strategies to deal with written verbal

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material. Instead of teaching students to grow in organizational ability through the organization of words alone, English teachers should help students organize tangible objects and pictures --- these leading to assist in the organization of words, concepts, and ideas in written composition. West concluded, "by ordering visually, we learn how to order verbally." In this vein, the Photo Story Discovery Set (1969) aided younger children to make visual sequences. These sequences can be based on an arrangement of pictures according to a sequence of time or according to an ordering of space dependent on the child's interpretation of the pictorial message. A further goal of the Discovery Set was to have children parallel the visual sequences by creating verbal counterparts for them. Because the visual compositions had been patterned on a model which was felt to have verbal parallels, the student could translate the visual sequences into a written verbal form.

Haber (1970) has suggested that one kind of memory exists for the recording and storage of pictorial material and another for the recording and storage of linguistic visual codings in the form of words. He found that recognition and retrieval of pictures in slide exposures was far more extensive than that of symbolic language. An important implication of his findings was that if techniques could be found to aid the attachment of words to visual images, then the recall of previous stimulation

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might significantly improve.

A Visual Strategy Plan to Generate Writing

If visual stimulation could facilitate linguistic stimulation by eliciting a written response to match visual meaning, then those students who are generally weak in composition could be aided by pictorial presentations. Individual shots of slides or pictures could be listened to correspond to a sentence and sequences of slide or picture shots could be correlated to a meaning sequence in a paragraph. (Sheridan, Owens, Macrorie, and Marcus, 1965). Thus, individual pictures could provide "context clues" for sentence production and a related series of shots could give rise to a coherent formulation of a paragraph. The common ground amongst students would be the meaning through association with the experience embedded in the visual message.

Furthermore, teachers of English and Reading could visually program meaning sequences on slides or pictures so that students would be assisted in organizing language and thought processing in following organizational styles of writing. Sequences of such pictorial aides, corresponding with specific paragraph patterns in writing, could induce organizational thought processes and provide cues for coherent writing as well. The purpose of such a visual-writing strategy plan would be threefold:

1. to increase stimulation and involvement in writing activities;

2. to guide the student in inferring

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organizational styles of writing from planned sequences of visual shots; and

3. to promote insights into reading a variety of paragraph patterns and writing styles.

All students who mentally participate in the transition from shot to shot would benefit from such a visual strategy plan. The level of language sophistication and thought processing of each student would determine how much gain in composition growth each would derive from all three purposes. Each would handle the topic according to his past knowledge of the subject, his affective involvement with it, and his language facility to express it. The visual sequences would call forth this language facility, and teacher guidance would be needed to direct each student's perceptions and affective reactions into a well-structured, coherent paragraph. In essence, the teacher would become the manager of thought processing. What transpires through the visual message is a one-to-one relationship between the experience and the student.

The student would be asked to infer the meaning of a series of shots, composed into a sequence, and to link them together in writing. The entire sequence of shots could correspond to a coherent, structured paragraph in writing and each shot would correspond to an aspect of that paragraph's sequence. A shot could approximate a sentence or a series of

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shots could generate one or a number of connected sentences. Thus, through pictorial arrangements, the student would be stimulated to write a unified paragraph that had an intended, prearranged structure at its base.

Paragraph Pattern References

Teachers would have to determine which type of style of writing or paragraph models they would wish to generate, i.e. narrative or chronological, descriptive, expository, etc. The visuals would have to be planned and arranged beforehand to guide the student's thought processing as he became involved in the writing activity. For references on paragraph patterns, teachers could turn to such sources as: Advanced Skills in Reading, Book 3 (Gainsburg, 1967); the English Grammar and Composition Series (Warriner, et al., 1969); the English Workshop Series (Warriner, et al., 1970); and the Listen and Read Series (Pauk, et al., 1969). Teachers may also wish to direct teaching efforts to lessons in "heeding the signposts in reading" (Smith, 1962) or to lessons from the Listen and Read Series (Pauk, et al., 1969) so that students could apply these transitional and oraganizational words to their own writing strategies. Dulin (1973) in a timely article made distinctions between two major styles of writing, the narrative and the expository, and offered additional suggestions to the classroom teacher in teaching to these styles.

A Visual to Verbal Literacy

This visual strategy plan is primarily a stimulus presen-

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tation to connect already existing language facility with idea. Pictures in the form of programmed sequences provide the stimulation and the involvement to write. Learning takes place when a more descriptive "visual" word is suggested by the teacher after the student has attempted his initial writing efforts. A verbal literacy would then be matched to a visual literacy as the student associates the meaning of the stronger word with an already existing visual impression.

Each shot should conjure up a flow of language, but the student's purpose should not be to describe each detail of each picture. He should try to relate the significant idea of each shot to the total meaning of the pre-arranged visual sequence. If the idea of the given sequence is solidified in the student's mind, and if he can relate the relevant ideas of each shot to the preceding one as well as to the forthcoming one, he will be on his way to constructing a unified paragraph. In his choice of language, the teacher can lend direction. But the student should try his writing attempts on his own first so that he could fully benefit from the triple purposes of this visual strategy plan- to think descriptively and inferentially, to translate this into coherent writing, and to generate and recognize organizational patterns of writing.

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